

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 CAIRO 09695 01 OF 02 091754Z
ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6002
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWIAT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 9695

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EG SY
SUBJ: CONTINUING EGYPTIAN SUSPICIONS OF SYRIA

SUMMARY: IN PUBLIC, EGYPT AND SYRIA APPEAR AGREED, IN GENERAL TERMS, ON TACTICS AND STRATEGY OF ARAB APPROACH TO PEACE PROCESS. IN FACT, EGYPTIANS HARBOR SUSPICIONS OF SYRIANS, WHICH SARG PROBABLY RECIPROCATES. EGYPTIAN MISGIVINGS INCLUDE: CONCERN THAT ASAD MAINTAINS "TOUGH LINE" WITH USG WHEN SADAT PERCEIVES FLEXIBILITY AS CRUCIAL; BELIEF SYRIA INSISTING ON UNITED MEPC DELEGATION FOR PURELY SYRIAN REASONS; CONCERN THAT SARG WILL SEEKING INFILTRATE AND CONTROL FATAH; WORRY THAT SYRIA WILL NEVER PULL OUT OF LEBANON; DISTRESS THAT WEST MAY TREAT ASAD, NOT SADAT, AS KEY ARAB NEGOTIATOR. EFFECTS OF THIS SIMMERING MUTUAL DISTRUST MIGHT INCLUDE DIMINISHED DEGREE OF

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PAGE 02 CAIRO 09695 01 OF 02 091754Z

SYRIAN/EGYPTIAN COORDINATION ON PEACE PROCESS, TROUBLE IN LEBANON, EGYPTIAN DECISION BREAK FROM ARAB RANKS AND EGYPTIAN RESENTMENT OF US STEMMING FROM PUTATIVE US DEFERENCE TO DAMASCUS.
END SUMMARY.

1. AT RIYADH MINI-SUMMIT LAST OCTOBER, SAUDIS SUCCEEDED IN ARRANGING RECONCILIATION BETWEEN SADAT AND ASAD. SINCE THAT

TIME, SADAT AND OTHER EGYPTIAN LEADERS HAVE REPEATEDLY EMPHASIZED PUBLICLY THAT EGYPT AND SYRIA ARE WORKING TOGETHER. THEY HAVE INDEED BEEN DOING SO, ALTHOUGH SOME OF THE SCARS CAUSED BY EARLIER SYRIAN ATTACKS ON SINAI II AND SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON HAVE NOT ENTIRELY DISAPPEARED. INDEED, MANY OF THE EARLIER EGYPTIAN SUSPICIONS OF SYRIAN INTENTIONS REMAIN UNASSUAGED, EVEN IF THEY ARE NOT TALKED ABOUT PUBLICLY. IN PRIVATE TALKS WITH SADAT AND FAHMY, SOME OF THESE CONTINUING EGYPTIAN MISGIVINGS ABOUT SYRIA FREQUENTLY EMERGE.

2. MANY OF THESE SUBSURFACE STRAINS ARE TRIVIAL, BUT SOME COULD DEVELOP INTO CRITICAL DISAGREEMENTS WHICH COULD QUICKLY DISRUPT "UNIFIED" ARAB NEGOTIATING FRONT. AMONG ISSUES FURTHEST TO THE FORE NOW, FROM GOE'S PERSPECTIVE, ARE:

(A) FLEXIBLE VERSUS TOUGH LINE. AS SADAT HAS DEMONSTRATED, HE BELIEVES

SOLE WORKABLE APPROACH TO SETTLEMENT NEGOTIATIONS MUST BE ONE WHICH IS BASED ON MUTUAL TRUST BETWEEN USG AND ARAB SIDE. HE SEEKS PLACE ALL CARDS ON TABLE FOR PRESIDENT CARTER AND EXPECTS THE SAME IN RETURN. MORE THAN THAT, HE HAS SPOKEN CONFIDENTIALLY OF HIS "OBLIGATION" TO CREATE NEW CARDS FOR USG TO PLAY; E.G., GOE'S ATTEMPTS FORGE "LINK" BETWEEN GOJ AND PALESTINE ENTITY. SADAT WORRIES THAT ASAD UNDERSTANDS NEITHER UTILITY OF FOSTERING TRUST BETWEEN DAMASCUS AND WASHINGTON NOR "NECESSITY" OF APPROACHING NEGOTIATIONS AS POSITIVELY AND CONSTRUCTIVELY AS POSSIBLE. THUS, FOR EXAMPLE, SADAT OBSERVED THAT ASAD HAD BEEN "TOO TOUGH" WITH PRESIDENT CARTER IN GENEVA, A CRITICISM WE UNDERSTAND TO MEAN THAT ASAD COULD HAVE DONE BETTER FOR CAUSE OF CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 CAIRO 09695 01 OF 02 091754Z

PEACE BY CONCENTRATING NOT ON DIFFICULTIES, BUT RATHER ON SOLUTIONS.

(B) ARAB DELEGATION IN GENEVA. EGYPTIANS FIRMLY BELIEVE SARG INSISTENCE ON UNIFIED ARAB DEL IS SELFISHLY SYRIAN PLOY. SYRIANS ARE PERCEIVED TO BE SEEKING INSURE AGAINST ANY SEPARATE EGYPTIAN/ISRAELI AGREEMENT BY TYING EGYPTIAN NEGOTIATORS TO IMPRACTICAL VEHICLE FOR ARAB CONSENSUS. GOE THINKS DAMASCUS FEARS A SINAI III, AND WORRIES THAT IF GOLAN ARRANGEMENT CANNOT BE MADE, EGYPTIANS, IN SEPARATE DEL, WOULD FIND IT EASIER SACRIFICE GOLAN AND WEST BANK.

(C) PLO. SADAT, FAHMY AND OTHERS REMAIN SUSPICIOUS THAT SARG WORKING CONSTANTLY TO SET UP MORE AND HIGHER PLACED CONTROLLED ASSETS WITHIN PLO, INCLUDING PLACING PRO-SYRIAN KHALID FAHUM IN CHAIRMAN'S SEAT. WHILE ARAFAT IS NOT SADAT'S FAVORITE PALESTINIAN, HE IS PERCEIVED AS RESISTANT TO BALNDISHMENTS OF ANY SINGLE ARAB PARTY, AND, THEREFORE, AN ACCEPTABLE CHAIRMAN.

(D) LEBANON. SADAT AND FAHMY BELIEVE THE SYRIANS HAVE NO INTENTION OF PULLING OUT OF LEBANON AND THUS SACRIFICING THEIR BID, AS EGYPT PERCEIVES IT, TO ULTIMATELY LEAD A NORTHERN FRONT (SYRIA, LEBANON, JORDAN, PALESTINE) WHICH WOULD RIVAL EGYPTIAN PREDOMINANCE IN ARAB AFFAIRS. EGYPTIANS FROM SADAT ON DOWN ARE ANXIOUS OBTAIN SOME SYRIAN COMMITMENT TO LEAVE AT SOME DESIGNATED TIME.

(E) CONCERN FOR SADAT'S IMAGE. DURING SINAI II NEGOTIATING PERIOD US PRESS REPORTS CALLING ASAD "NEW SUPERSTAR" OF MIDDLE EAST LITERALLY INFURIATED SENIOR EGYPTIAN OFFICIALS, WHO, LIKE ALL THEIR COMPATRIOTS, BECAME ACUTELY DEFENSIVE ABOUT ERODING CENTRALITY OF EGYPTIAN LEADERSHIP POSITION DURING LEBANESE CIVIL WAR. FACT THAT PRESIDENT CARTER TRAVELED TO GENEVA TO MEET ASAD RANKLED. FAHMY HAS TOLD US SADAT WILL NOT GO ALL THE WAY TO WASHINGTON AGAIN. THIS CONCERN WITH IMAGE IS NOT FRIVOLUS; IT BEARS ALSO ON INTERNAL POSITION OF SADAT, WHOSE

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 CAIRO 09695 01 OF 02 091754Z

EGYPTIAN CONSTITUENCY EXPECTS HIM TO ACT AND BE TREATED AS UNRIValed SENIOR ARAB STATESMAN.

(F) CONFEDERATION OF ARAB REPUBLICS. MORIBUND CAR (EGYPT/SYRIA/LEBANON) SEEMS NON-ISSUE, BUT SADAT APPARENTLY BELIEVES SYRIANS WANT LIBYA TO STAY IN. SADAT, AS HE SAID PUBLICLY, HOPES LIBYANS WILL DECIDE TO PULL OUT BUT DOES NOT INTEND ACT TO EXPEL THEM.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 CAIRO 09695 02 OF 02 091801Z
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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 02 OF 02 CAIRO 9695

3. OBVIOUSLY, VIEW FROM DAMASCUS IS DIFFERENT, IN SOME CASES MIRROR OPPOSITE OF EGYPTIAN PRECEPTIONS. DAMACUS SUSPICIONS OF CAIRO ARE AS ENDEMIC AS OTHER WAY AROUND. EFFECTS OF THIS SIMMERING MUTUAL DISTRUST ON PEACE PROCESS COULD LOGICALLY INCLUDE FOLLOWING POSSIBILITIES:

(A) DIMINISHED DEGREE OF COORDINATION. EXCEPT FOR RIYADH MINI-SUMMIT PRIOR FAHMD'S TRIP TO US, SYRIAN/EGYPTIAN COORDINATION HAS NOT BEEN OVERLY CLOSE AND THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE CONTACTS WOULD DEVELOP AS CLOSELY AS WE MIGHT LIKE AT SUCH TIME AS WE ARE URGING SINGLE ARAB POSITION.

(B) RENEWED LEBANESE FIGHTING. GOE'S TOTAL OPPOSITION TO USE OF ADF (I.E., SYRIAN ARMY) AGAINST PALESTINIAN CAMPS WOULD

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 CAIRO 09695 02 OF 02 091801Z

COME OUT INTO OPEN IF CURRENT SYRIAN PATIENCE AND RESTRAINT COME TO ABRUPT END. IF UNEASY LEBANESE TRUCE WERE TO DISINTEGRATE, ARAB/ISRAEL PEACE PROCESS UNDOUBTEDLY BE ADVERSELY AFFECTED.

(C) EGYPTIANS GO IT ALONE. IF SADAT'S CONCERN ABOUT WHAT HE CALLS SYRIAN "INFLEXIBILITY" (HE HAS CITED ASAD'S "TOUGH TALK" TO PRESIDENT CARTER IN GENEVA) IS AGGRAVATED, EGYPTIANS' CURRENT EFFORT PLAY GAME OF ARAB SOLIDARITY COULD GO BY THE BOARDS. DESPITE SADAT'S MAJOR STRESS ON MAINTAINING AND DEVELOPING UNITED ARAB POSITION, WE DO NOT PRECLUDE POSSIBILITY THAT INCREASED ANTI-SYRIAN SUSPICIONS COULD DECIDE HIM GIVE UP ON COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT AND PRESS INSTEAD FOR SOME VERSION SINAI III, PROVIDED IT HE COULD PERSUADE SAUDIS THAT HE MUST DO SO BECAUSE OF SYRIAN INTRANSIGENCE.

(D) POTENTIAL EGYPTIAN RESENTMENT OF US. LIKE IT OR NOT (AND OTHER ARABS HATE IT), EGYPTIANS HAVE UNABASHED SUPERIORITY COMPLEX VIS-A-VIS OTHER ARABS. EGYPTIAN CONFIDENCE IN DIPLOMATIC FIELD OFTEN REACHES LEVEL OF ARROGANCE-- NO OTHER ARABS ARE AS HISTORICALLY AND CULTURALLY EQUIPPED TO DEAL WITH "MATTERS OF DESTINY." EGYPTIANS BELIEVE NEITHER PEACE NOR WAR IS POSSIBLE IN ME

WITHOUT THEIR CONCURRENCE, A CLAIM THEY MAINTAIN NO OTHER ARAB STATE CAN MAKE. EGYPTIANS FIND IT HARD TO ACCEPT THAT THEIR MUCH VAUNTED "LEADERSHIP" ROLE IN ARAB WORLD HAS FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS, AMONG THEM EGYPT'S NATIONAL MEDICANCY, DILUTED AND ANY SUGGESTION TO THIS EFFECT MAKES THEM DEFENSIVE AND TOUCHY. SADAT WAS HURT AND FAHMY BITTER ABOUT WHAT THEY REGARD AS TILT TOWARD SYRIA DURING 1976 AND SUBJECT IS FREQUENTLY REVIVED. CARE WILL HAVE TO BE TAKEN TO FIND APPROPRIATE OCCASIONS TO ACKNOWLEDGE, PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY, PROMINENT, IF NOT PREEMINENT ROLE WE ASSIGN TO SADAT AND EGYPT IN PEACE EFFORT.

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